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BARBARA POWERS

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She Married a Sky Spy David Cort

The celebrated case of the U-2 pilot, Francis Gary Powers, shot down near Sverdlovsk in the Urals, could certainly not be closed until we heard what Powers' divorced wife had to say. This critical lacuna has now been filled by a paperback called *Spy Wife*, by Barbara Gay Moore Powers and W. W. Diehl (Pyramid, 60c).

Absurd, ignominious and barely readable though this true confession is, it also gives us some backdoor information, which we must appreciate, about the style of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the people it hires, not to speak of their families. From a moderately pretty and commonplace Georgia girl we ought to be able to read the truth, if we learn how to read her.

And so, what sort of girl is Barbara? She is the product of a representative Georgia family. Her mother, who is a matron in the Milledgeville mental hospital, has had four husbands: #1 disappeared, #2 died of a heart attack, #3 an alcoholic, was committed to the asylum, #4 also an alcoholic and also committed, was released. When the U-2 case broke, it meant to her primarily that her son-in-law was a \$30,000-a-year man; she began spending on that scale, and got violent about it. Later, the family followed its magic formula by committing Barbara for alcoholism. However Barbara, who can type 160 words a minute, is not stupid and was out in five weeks. Her problem was not only alcohol; it was, she said, that her mother could outdrink her. Barbara looks on liquor as high style; her mother is more Georgian about it.

Powers, whom Barbara married while he was an Air Force lieutenant, apparently had no problems. Originally a shy farm boy, he was accomplished in archery, skin diving, tennis, bowling, hunting and speleology—a natural athlete. If we can believe Barbara, he never told her—after he joined Lockheed, fronting for the CIA—what he was doing. Eventually he offered her the cover story of "weather reconnais-

sance." This fact tells a good deal about both his taciturnity and his conjugal love.

Barbara's character comes out in her memoir style: of her wedding night, "Lordy, but how that Ridge Runner of mine could make love!"; after a miscarriage, "Gary was demanding my body within four days"; of the Parthenon, "its 48 [there are 46] great columns are thrilling to behold," and other dutiful tourist raptures. The Russians allowed her three hours alone with Powers in his cell. She says that under the pretense of holding hands they scribbled coded CIA messages on each other's palms. (This sounds preposterous, but how could anyone invent such nonsense?) A moment later, she says, she was naked ("stark," naturally) and they brought it off three times in the allotted three hours, doubtless scribbling code meanwhile on each other's anatomies. Back in the United States, the CIA's main line of interrogation was to determine that she was sure the man she had seen was Powers.

A good deal of *Spy Wife* is given to repleading her case at the divorce, and in a few years these passages will bore even Barbara. They may interest her mother's town of Milledgeville, where the bystanders included the late Flannery O'Connor whose fictional version of that society is in no way contradicted here.

At the end Barbara says that her secondary aim, after defending her fair name, is to expose "the highly questionable machinations" of the CIA. In support of this aim, she cites *The Nation* several times. The impression does come through that the CIA habitually acts with dreamy extravagance and summary haste. On May 6, 1960, five days after Powers' capture, two CIA men appeared at his wife's trailer in Adana, Turkey, at 5 A.M. and bundled her off (with a broken leg) to America. The CIA supplied the U-2 group with the "best houses" in Adana, described by Barbara as hovels, then with 50-foot house trailers. The group was forbidden to associate with other Americans, and thus entertained one another at unending cocktail parties. A CIA map always available to the wives all

over the Eastern world. Powers, when caught, was equipped with a poison needle in a silver dollar in case he felt like committing suicide. (He isn't the type.) When Powers was released, the CIA hid him out, first at the CIA-staffed Ashford Farms near Bellevue, Md., for twenty-four days, then whisked him with Barbara over the countryside in convoy, telling them to duck to the floor when passing through villages. At Powers' divorce, a CIA man was in court to nod permission to Powers to answer questions.

The CIA's every action breathes decision but not thought. What it needs is somebody who can think second or third thoughts.

Beyond this, one may wonder whether America typically produces espionage types who are not also automatic security risks. The college wild men, the check bouncers, the remittance men have not been accepted and tamed here, as they have in England. Actors and public relations men might be suitable for some CIA functions, but in America they prefer their careers. Perhaps a promising CIA crop is now being nurtured in the beatniks, after they calm down, or rev up. Perhaps the CIA should be taken over bodily by the high-pressure news magazines, with special assignments for *True* and *Playboy*. I wish I could solve the agency's personnel problem, but I doubt that espionage is a national talent.

Of course, Powers was not a spy; he was a mechanic and, so saying, James Donovan was able to negotiate the exchange of one true spy, Rudolph Abel, for three Americans, including Powers. Donovan flew home with Powers on February 10, 1962, and has this to say: "Powers was a special type. People at home had been critical of his performance. . . . Yet in charity, suppose you wished to recruit an American to sail a shaky espionage glider over hostile Russia. . . . Powers was a man who, for adequate pay, would do it, and as he passed over Minsk, would calmly reach for a salami sandwich."

Aside from the fact that the sandwich was Spam, pimented and tuna fish, Powers would not settle for that much of an apostrophe.

David Cort is a frequent *Nation* contributor.

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